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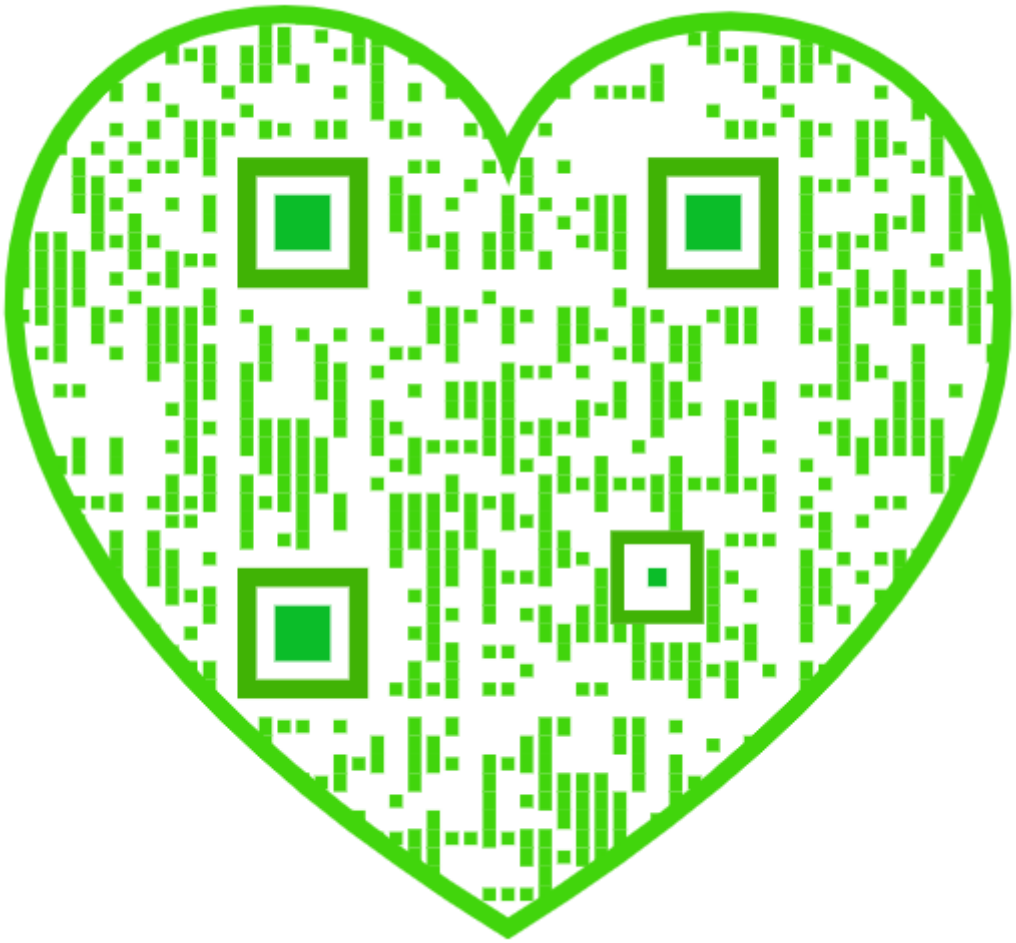
Bridge

By

George Fitch



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Bridge Whist

By

George Fitch

P F Collier & Son
New York

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BRIDGE WHIST

The Lead Pencil as a Factor in the Game.

Abolition of the Long Flowing Sleeves of Society Leaders.

Revealing the Broken Suspender Button by the Turn of the Card.

Four Years' Apprenticeship for the 1,111 Rules and Penalties.

BRIDGE WHIST

BRIDGE WHIST is ordinary whist with a wheel-of-fortune attachment. It is a cross between double-entry bookkeeping and roulette, and is played with a deck of cards, an adding machine, and a promissory note. It is listed as a game, but generally varies between a vice and a life-calling.

Bridge whist can easily be explained to any one who knows all about ordinary whist, compound fractions, Robert's rules of order, wireless telegraphy, mind-reading and silent signals. The rules of ordinary whist prevail as

far as they go, but, in order to make the game appear more like real financiering, each suit is given a different value in the counting. Each trick over six when spades are trumps counts two pennies or automobiles, depending upon the location of the game. Clubs count four, diamonds six, and hearts eight. It is also possible to cut out trumps altogether by a simple mechanism, in which case each trick counts twelve.

Then, in order to add a Wall Street zest to the game, the values of these tricks can be doubled or quadrupled by any one with a taste for

plunging; and in order to complicate matters still farther, so that the experienced player may get her just dues from the beginner, each court card is permitted at times to break into the score with a count of its own. This explains the double-entry feature of the game. After a hand has been played, and the winner's extra tricks have been multiplied by 2, 4, 6, 8, 12, 24, 48, or 96, according to the value of the trumps and the intensity of the proceedings, the losers appropriate the pencil and do a little harvesting of their own. If they have held a majority of

court cards in the trump suit, they may count themselves twice the value of the trump suit. If they have held four court cards, they get four times the value of the trump, and if they have held five, they get five times its value. That ought to be enough, but it isn't. To show that the game was invented by a firm believer in monopoly, it is possible, if you hold four court cards in one hand, to count yourself eight times the value of the trump, while five court cards in one hand gives you ten times the trump's value.

Thus it will readily be seen that, while the winners of a hand in bridge may cord up a total of two points by skill, the losers may make ten times that much, simply by standing in with the royal family. This makes it evident, without explanation, that the game was invented in England.

The fascination of bridge lies partly in the fact that the game continues to be interesting long after the last card has been played. The participants generally play a rubber of three games, and then spend the rest of the evening doing sums in simple

addition, to find out who won. To-night they will find out who won last night's game, but they will not find out who won to-night's game until some one remembers to bring home another tablet of scratch paper.

Counting Them Out with the Lead Pencil

THE varying values in bridge account for its peculiarly exasperating qualities and its skill in breaking up families. The lead pencil is forever elbowing its way into the game and nullifying the most brilliant play-

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. . . doing sums in simple addition to find out who won . . .

ing. The winners may, by the most magnificent and superscintillating whist, manage to drag out a trick in the face of great odds and win a rubber. Yet, at the end of the game, the losers may excuse themselves, and, after half an hour's work with a bank examiner, demonstrate that the winners owe them anywhere from thirty cents to a month's house rent, simply because the losers were skilful enough to hold the honor cards that were dealt them.

Thus, as in pugilism, the strong point in bridge whist lies in counting your oppo-

nents out. There are other and more harrowing ways of doing it, too. When your opponent has made the trump, you may decide that you have the requisite seven tricks in your hand. If you are a sport, you will then "double"—that is, double the amount which the extra trick will win. If your opponents are people of nerve and recklessness, they will "double back," thus quadrupling the values. You are then likely, after a hasty mental inventory of your securities, to double once more, thus multiplying the trick by eight, after which the game will proceed with clenched

teeth, each trick lost meaning another opera ticket gone. It is under these circumstances that ladies who are otherwise lovely and amiable have been known to whip out a trump after "revoking," and sweep the boards with a cold and haughty air which defies criticism, providing their social positions are sufficiently above those of their victims. Such incidents lead the wrathful losers to make remarks, which in time become rumors, and before any one realizes it another social center has been shaken to the core.

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Just how bridge whist got its name is not generally known. It is possible that it is called "bridge" because so many people get 'cross over it. It is sometimes called the "'bridge" of cusses, to distinguish it from that other famous bridge in Venice.

Bridge is a quaint and ceremonious game as far as the actual playing of cards goes, though often resembling a stock market afterward. It is as full of etiquette as fencing. It doesn't matter what you do to your opponent, but you must do it just so. The cards are dealt just as they are in denatured whist—thirteen to

each player. This proves that there is something in the thirteen superstition, for every player immediately remarks about his or her bad luck. When the dealer has finished his nefarious work, he looks over his hand and figures out which suit is most likely to make his opponents wish they were dead. If he can't find a good suit, or if his partner kicks him under the table, or if he thinks it is more fun to criticize some one else's choice of trumps, he "passes it over" to his partner, compelling her to choose. When the trump has been decided, the eldest

hand, which may or may not belong to the youngest player, coyly inquires:

"Shall I play, partner?"

And the latter answers:

"Pray do."

This is positively the only time that prayer and bridge whist get into the same room together.

When the game really starts, a most important thing happens. The dealer's partner spreads her cards down on the table, face up, neatly arranged in suits, and retires from the game, leaving her partner to play both hands. This provision has been found necessary from the fact that

the game affords 400 times more chances for getting mad than ordinary whist. By giving each player in turn a chance to go out on the porch and cool off, by kicking the spindles out of the porch balustrade, the wise inventor of the game has made it possible for four mad people to play through an entire evening without biting each other.

Having everything his own way, like the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the dealer goes gaily through the game, playing both hands with a confident "I-know-what-you're-going-to-get-next" expression that is most

disconcerting. Formerly by-law 94, section 6, prescribed that if the dealer led from his own hand when he should have led from the "dummy" hand he must be penalized one trick. This rule, however, led to so much nervous prostration and temporary insanity that it has recently been suspended from all bridge whist that is played on the low gear.

When the hand has been played the winners add up their extra tricks, multiply the score properly, and enter it in the proper place on the score-card. Both sides then quarrel over the question of

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. . . a chance to go out on the porch and cool off, by kicking the spindles out of the porch balustrade . . .

"honors" or court cards, and the side which wins enters its honor score in another part of the ledger. Thirty points constitutes a game and two games out of three make a rubber. The winner of the rubber gets 100 extra points for its honor score, which is not included in the game score. When the evening's play is over the players retire for refreshments, leaving their secretaries and tellers to post up the books and compute the returns. When the game is played merely for amusement this ceremony is often omitted, the books being balanced once a month.

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Bridge has become immensely popular in society circles for several reasons. In the first place, it does away with the necessity for conversation, thus putting the rich and the intelligent on an equality. In the second place, it provides a polite and comparatively painless method of distributing wealth, into which the Socialists would do well to look. In the third place, a good knowledge of bridge gives the player unlimited facilities for showing calm superiority, haughty disdain, amused contempt, and other expressions which distinguish the real things

from the bargain counter brigade.

As a rule a special costume is prescribed for bridge players. In London, however, women are supposed to play the game in tight-fitting costumes with short sleeves. Formerly, when long, flowing sleeves were the style, it was found in certain circles that when a society leader's hand was very poor she generally managed to sweep a few cards off the table with her voluminous cuffs, thus mixing up the game and putting the auditor under a great disadvantage. Long, flowing sleeves were abolished in

poker games in the West many years ago, but for a different reason. Whereas the London sleeves got the cards off the table the Nevada sleeves got them on to the table. The former was harder on the reputation, but the latter was more detrimental to health.

The Rules of Bridge for Blood

THERE are two kinds of bridge whist—bridge for fun and bridge for blood. The rules of play in the former are comparatively simple, but in the latter

there are as many rules as there are in golf when it is being played by two Scotchmen. In a game for blood, where each player is counting on paying grocery bills if the right card is turned, nothing is left to chance. The conversational lid is clamped tightly down, and the only words allowed during play are prescribed by the rules. This is necessary, owing to the great chance for signaling between partners. A mild and inoffensive word, like "pshaw," may mean only indignation to the opposition, while to your partner it may mean: "Lead trumps and

divide the swag in the alley later." In the highest circles where bridge is played with the passion of the true artist, a wink or a sneeze may be as serious to the winker's or sneezer's reputation as a fifth ace is in another and popular card game.

As a celebrated authority on bridge has remarked, perfection in the game is accomplished slowly and after long effort. One may learn the political game in a year, and in the course of a few years may perfect himself in astronomy, Sanskrit, biology, and bridge-building.

Perfection in bridge, however, is not so easy a matter. It requires not only a knowledge of the 1,111 rules and penalties, the best plays, and the best methods of settling large debts on a small income, but it calls for great skill in deduction and mind-reading. The accomplished player is supposed to read by the play of a card not only the intention of the player but the hand which he holds. Naturally, only long practise will enable you to know that when an opponent has put a three-spot of clubs on your ace of trumps she holds four more clubs, is short on spades,

will take the second trick in diamonds, owes for the diamonds she wears and has a hole in the heel of her left stocking. Yet this is child's play to the accomplished bridge player.

Before the beginner attempts to play bridge he should devote at least four years to a study of the game. The first year should be devoted to learning the rules and penalties, the conversation of the game, and the meaning of such mysteries as "chicane," "cross ruffing," "eldest hand," "established suit," "guarded honors," "dummy," "grand

slam," "Little slam," "Yarborough," "Singleton," and the other 99 terms which are used to fog up the game for the beginner and make him easy meat. At the end of the first year the novice should have acquired such a vocabulary that the ordinary citizen will be able to understand only one word in seven of his bridge conversation.

The Art of Card-Talk

THE second year should be spent in the study of bridge from the standpoint of mathematics, telepathy, psychology, and

astrology. By the end of this year the student should be able to know the results which will follow from leading a seven of diamonds in the last game of a rubber in an established suit against the dealer in the dark of the moon. He should also be able to diagnose his opponent's hand so well that it will be plain to him, when the latter discards a weak spade on a high heart, on the defensive during the third hand with the score 10 to 8 against him and the thermometer at 78° Fahrenheit, that he is holding protected honors, will lead through if he gets a chance,

and that, moreover, in a moment of intense excitement he has broken a suspender button in the rear of his wardrobe. There are 17,876,432 combinations of this sort in bridge, and the good player knows all of them.

The third year should be devoted to the reading and translating of signs. Bridge abounds in signs, which are permissible and highly useful. You are expected to tell from the cards your partner leads whether she expects you to trump, to discard, to lead from your strong suit, or to have a

convulsion and delay the game until the trump is forgotten. You can also tell by signs what your partner thinks of you. When she lifts her eyebrows, after you have played, she means "chump." When she shrugs her shoulders she means "idiot." When she glares pleasantly she means: "Why didn't you return my lead?" When she smiles politely while grinding her teeth she means: "Why do I play with a numskull?" It is not pleasant to the beginner to understand these signs, but it is useful, for as soon as the student has

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When she glares pleasantly she means:
"Why didn't you return my lead?"

learned all the plays he will not be content until he can use these signs himself.

The fourth or senior year can be spent profitably on the fine points of the game —how to make the novice feel happy and contented when he is losing $5 a minute; how to quarrel with a lady in a gentlemanly manner; how to quote Rule 39 to an opponent in such a manner as to make him feel that when it comes to playing bridge your game is of the cantilever variety, while his is only a culvert. This is also a fine year in which to learn how to play $7,500

worth of bridge a year on a $5,000 salary and come out even or better.

With his education thus finished, the beginner need have no hesitation in entering the most refined and exclusive circles, and mingling freely with the best players without leaving his watch at home. Knowing bridge, he will need to know neither conversation nor manners. In a good stiff game there is no time for either.

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A Few Helpful Definitions

THESE few remarks would not be complete without some definitions of bridge terms which will be found both useful and necessary. The following are the most important:

"Dummy"—The leader's partner; your partner.

"To Ruff"—To trump.

To "Cross Ruff"—To make your partner cross by trumping.

"Grand Slam"—To show temper in putting down a card.

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"Revoke"—A riot signal, produced by refusing to follow suit when you have it.

"Finesse"—To economize in spots when taking a trick.

"Pass it Over"—During the game, to allow your partner to name the trump. After the game, to settle up.

"Eldest Hand"—The hand which is dealt first.

"Old Hand"—The player who comes out ahead.

"Love All"—Something which happens at the beginning of a game and never again.

"Odd Trick"—To play something of which your partner does not approve.

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"Points"—What you make money on, the same as in Wall Street.

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